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Distinctions among Terms Used to Describe Emotions and Moods

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Emotion theorists continue to debate about differences between emotions and moods. Many agree that emotions are necessarily directed at objects, whereas moods are not. This, and other, alternative differences between mood and emotion terms were examined. Fifty undergraduate students were asked to rate a number of affect terms according to their object-directedness, duration, intensity, physiological impact, and psychological feeling states. The results were analyzed to illustrate possible differences between moods and emotions. Implications of the results are discussed.

Cornelius (1996) differentiates among four schools of thought on the nature of emotion, including the following: (1) Darwinian, (2) Jamesian, (3) Cognitivist, and (4) Social Constructionist. The first school of thought, the Darwinian, suggests that emotion expression is a function of serviceable habits that have evolved with the organism. Serviceable habits themselves were not associated with a given emotion per se initially, but through time they become interconnected and rarely separated. William James's conception of emotion is similar to that of Darwin's, though he emphasized that emotions are physiological and that, without the physiology of emotion, there would be no emotion experience. The cognitivist approach to emotion suggests that emotions necessarily involve a cognitive component, suggesting that emotions are judgments or appraisals (Solomon, 2004). The fourth perspective highlighted by Cornelius is the social constructionist theory often credited to James Averill (1975). This perspective states that emotions are culturally and social constructed and that the historical context of the individual impacts the experience of a given emotion and may even create the emotion experience.

Although these four perspectives have offered insight into emotions, there is a marked absence of research on the differentiation of emotions and moods.

Historically speaking, emotions and moods have typically been differentiated by the stipulation that emotions take objects and moods do not (Calhoun & Solomon, 1984). Aristotle made the observation that anger, which he deemed an emotion, is "necessarily always directed towards someone in particular." Thus, the idea that emotions are object-directed began centuries ago and continues to be a criterion to this day for distinguishing emotions from moods (Cornelius, 1996; Ekman & Davidson, 1994; Scherer, Wranik, Sangsue, Tran, & Scherer, 2004). However, research is sparse as to possible distinctions between terms used to describe emotions and moods beyond object-directedness. Many researchers have looked at the various aspects of emotions, such as duration, intensity, psychological feeling, and various physiological responses (Alvarado, 1998; Averill, 1975; Niedenthal, Auxiette, Nugier, Dalle, Bonin, & Fayol, 2004). Measures of these features have successfully differentiated among categories of affect (Innes-Ker & Niedenthal, 2002). It was the goal of the present study to further develop distinctions among the states affect-related terms describe.

Our first hypothesis was that terms used to describe emotions and moods differ in that emotion terms describe object-directed states, whereas mood terms do not. Because many researchers agree that object-directedness is an attribute of emotions and not moods, this stood as a litmus test for the emotion and mood terms considered for this study (Frijda, 1994; Bilimoria, 2004; Cornelius, 1996).

Our second hypothesis was derived from the first and asserts that if the states referred to by emotion and mood terms differ as to object-directedness, then they may also differ in other respects. William James (1884) and more recently Paul Ekman and Richard Davidson (1994) would agree that biological contributions are integral to emotion experience if not altogether the entire nature of emotion. Also, Magda Arnold (1969) would emphasize a cognitive component to emotion in the form of judgments or appraisals. Thus, according to Arnold, emotion experience, in contrast to mood states, depends on the cognitive appraisal that initiates a psychological feeling state associated with a particular emotion.

Considering the difference derived from research in object-directedness, and the subsequent theories that illustrate other differences in emotion experience, it was hypothesized that there would be differences across ratings of emotion and mood terms on scales related to physiological and psychological states. These differences may indicate differences in how individuals understand the terms used to describe mood states as opposed to emotion states.

Subjects, Procedures, and Data Analysis

Preliminary to the final questionnaire with the aforementioned scales, an initial list of terms used to describe emotions and moods was compiled from previous research (Averill, 1975; Niedenthal et al., 2004; Alvarado, 1998; Scherer et al., 2004). Averill's (1975) semantic atlas of emotion concepts was the starting point with its 530 terms used to describe emotion and/or mood states, and his terms were combined with terms from other lists. After redundancies among the terms were removed, 866 affect-related terms remained. A group of five independent raters rated

each of the 866 terms on a Likert type scale for familiarity. They ranked each term on a scale from one to nine where nine was "very familiar" and one was "very unfamiliar."

On the basis of the familiarity ratings, the top 100 terms were then rated for object-directedness by four different independent raters (see Appendix A). The object-directedness test was designed to differentiate terms hypothesized to refer to emotions and those referring to moods. Terms that were unanimously rated as object-directed were categorized as emotions, terms unanimously rated as not object-directed were categorized as moods, and terms on which the raters were divided were categorized as other or unknown.

From the 100 terms, the 20 most familiar emotion terms, the 15 most familiar mood terms, and the 15 most familiar other or unknown terms are shown in Table 4. These 50 terms were compiled into a questionnaire on which participants were to rate each term on scales of intensity, duration, psychological feeling, and physiological impact. Many of the scales were used in previous research for the purpose of distinguishing between different types of emotions as opposed to this study's focus on differences between moods and emotions (Levenson, 1994; Averill, 1975; Niedenthal et al., 2004). The final questionnaire was administered to 50 undergraduate students in classroom settings (see Appendix B for sample questions).

The data was subsequently compiled and analyzed. A multivariate analysis of variance was conducted, along with univariate follow-up analyses of the dependent variables to determine significance. Term category (emotion, mood, or other) served as the independent variable and the 15 scales served as dependent variables. The MANOVA indicated that the three categories of terms did differ from one another across the linear combination of the scales and the follow-up univariate ANOVAs indicated that the term categories differed across each of the ratings scales. A discriminant analysis was therefore conducted to determine a pattern of differences among the term categories across the rating scales.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 indicates that the three categories of affect terms (emotion, mood, and other) were distinguishable on the basis of ratings on the dependent variables ($p < .001$). The significance of these findings allows for the possible delineation of similarities and differences for the three categories of affect terms and substantiates the usefulness of the selected scales.

Table 2 shows the means of the dependent variables according to the term categories assigned. It may be seen that emotions were rated higher on intensity and the psychological feeling scales (calm/violent, mild/turbulent, etc.), whereas moods were rated higher on duration. Duration is one measure often used to differentiate between emotions and moods (Davidson, 1994; Frijda, 1994). Also, emotions were rated slightly higher than moods on physiological impact, though the ratings indicate the physiological contribution may be small. The “other” category seems more sporadic and ultimately seems to overlap with emotion and mood categories on various scales.

Table 3 shows the standardized discriminant function scores for the dependent variables. The two functions found through discriminant analysis emphasize two of the major scale differentiators: Function 1 emphasized psychological feeling and Function 2 emphasized physiological impact. The separation of the data into these two functions indicates that the scales that contribute to each function discriminate the different terms among the three categories. Thus, the scales differentiate to some extent between the three hypothesized categories of affect terms (emotions, moods, and others).

Figure 1 is a graph of the terms and category means plotted in the space derived from the two discriminant functions. The emotions seemed to cluster together, thus indicating the scales’ ability to identify emotions as having similarities. The moods are less striking in their similarities according to the figure; however, twice as many mood terms appear on the left quadrants of the graph than do on the right quadrants. The “other” terms were spread over the figure and therefore fit the

independent raters’ initial finding with the object-directedness survey that some of the terms may have both emotion and mood characteristics. This implies that when certain terms are used to describe affective states, they may indicate experiences similar to that of emotion and/or mood states.

Figure 2 was formulated to indicate groupings of the terms from the ratings within the hypothesized categories. As can be seen, certain moods fell in the vicinity of the emotion grouping while some emotions fell more closely to the grouping of moods. Also, the “other” terms seemed to be separable into more emotion-like and more mood-like categories. This may indicate that certain moods behave more like emotions according to the ratings and vice versa. This idea holds for the group of “other” terms in that some were rated more like emotions and some like moods.

Upon further analysis, terms from the “other” category that were found in the emotion group seem to carry a negative affective state whereas those rated like the mood group seem to carry a positive affective state. Perhaps the dimension that separated the other category into these two groups was the positive and negative valence of the psychological feeling scales that seemed to load on Function 1. Thus, the scales discriminated terms in the “other” category into two groups not foreseen by the original hypotheses.

Conclusion and Implications

The first hypothesis suggested a standard difference between emotions and moods, that of object-directedness. If this assumption is correct and the independent raters correctly categorized the terms into object-directed and non-object-directed affective states (emotions and moods), then perhaps the scales chosen did not discriminate the emotions and moods perfectly because they do not tap this distinction. Object-directedness did separate the terms into emotions and moods to some extent. However, perhaps these scales illustrate the possibility that object-directedness is not a consistent difference between emotions and moods and these scales do not consistently discriminate between affective terms that behave as moods and those that behave as emotions either.

The second and third hypotheses stated that, in addition to the object-directedness hypothesis, the terms may also differ according to other dimensions, and other scales may distinguish terms used to describe emotions and moods. The data substantiate these claims, illustrating through discriminant analysis that emotions and moods may differ in their levels of psychological feeling and physiological impact. This implies that the terms used to describe certain affective states mean different things and communicate different meanings. Thus, a person who is experiencing a certain level of physiological impact or psychological feeling will use one term to describe his or her affective state. The findings indicate that, as these levels of physiological impact or psychological feeling change, so will the term used by an individual to describe the affective state.

The findings of this study indicate that there is consistency in the way that affect terms are used. Some are used to refer to affective states with predominantly psychological feeling characteristics (Function 1) while other terms refer to states with physiological impact characteristics (Function 2) or some combination of the two. This implies a level of agreement among English-speakers not only as to what a particular term means, but in the characteristics of the experiences the terms describe. Therefore, from these findings, it may be seen that a possible function of affective terms may be to assist individuals in making sense of their affective states and those experienced by others. Emotions and moods, though different, carry meaning for the individuals who experience and observe them. Terms describing these experiences, according to our findings, allow individuals to label states that carry with them cognitive and physiological components. It would be problematic if a given language required a dialogue of psychological feeling and physiological impact for each affective state before individuals could understand one another's states. Thus the unique ability of humans to make sense of their environments is aided by the terms used to describe emotions, moods, and other affective states. Understanding what components of psychological feeling and physiological impact are part of each affective term aids in that ability to explain the human experience.

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Table 1: Univariate Analyses of Dependent Variables

Dependent Variable	F	Sig.
Intensity	11.02	< .001
Duration	30.06	< .001
Calm/Violent	54.10	< .001
Mild/Turbulent	64.29	< .001
Relaxed/Energized	31.98	< .001
Peace/Upset	165.40	< .001
Attraction/Aversion	161.47	< .001
Comfortable/Uncomfortable	160.92	< .001
Pleasure/Distress	179.12	< .001
Increased Heart Rate	46.67	< .001
Sweaty Palms	31.84	< .001
Rapid Breathing	25.62	< .001
Flushes	28.47	< .001
Chills	9.92	< .001
Trembling	31.84	< .001

Table 2: Means of Dependent Variables for Each Term Category

Dependent Variable	Emotion	Mood	Other
Intensity	4.69	4.67	4.33
Duration	3.77	4.42	3.92
Calm/Violent	3.93	3.93	3.33
Mild/Turbulent	4.30	3.34	3.55
Relaxed/Energized	4.36	3.76	3.70
Peace/Upset	4.82	3.16	3.65
Attraction/Aversion	4.78	3.06	3.68
Comfortable/Uncomfortable	4.95	3.20	3.77
Pleasure/Distress	4.99	3.11	3.74
Increased Heart Rate	4.03	3.31	3.13
Sweaty Palms	3.00	2.39	2.36
Rapid Breathing	3.21	2.77	2.54
Flushes	2.68	2.23	2.04
Chills	1.96	1.78	1.65
Trembling	2.55	2.07	1.90

Table 3: Standardized Discriminant Function Scores for Each Dependent Variable

Dependent Variable	Function 1	Function 2
Intensity	0.06	0.29
Duration	-0.21	0.36
Calm/Violent	-0.12	-0.59
Mild/Turbulent	0.03	-0.10
Relaxed/Energized	-0.08	0.37
Peace/Upset	0.33	0.12
Attraction/Aversion	0.27	-0.25
Comfortable/Uncomfortable	-0.03	-0.06
Pleasure/Distress	0.45	0.19
Increased Heart Rate	0.36	0.43
Sweaty Palms	0.02	-0.24
Rapid Breathing	-0.34	0.12
Flushes	0.07	0.29
Chills	-0.09	-0.07
Trembling	0.09	0.29

Table 4: Hypothesized Categories of Emotions, Moods, and Others from Object-Directedness Survey

Emotions (20)	Moods (15)	Other (15)
bored	grief	enthusiastic
mad	determination	pride
uncomfortable	cheerful	desperate
sad	caring	appreciative
hate	erotic	guilty
happy	lonely	careful
anxious	romantic	doubt
angry	sensitive	impatient
nervous	pain	calm
confused	aggressive	passionate
depressed	shy	relaxed
scared	compassionate	respect
embarrassed	carefree	insecure
confident	excitement	mean
afraid	comfortable	pessimistic
disappointed		
ashamed		
love		
bitter		
fear		

Figure 1: Scatter Diagram of Discriminant Means for Terms on Functions 1 and 2.

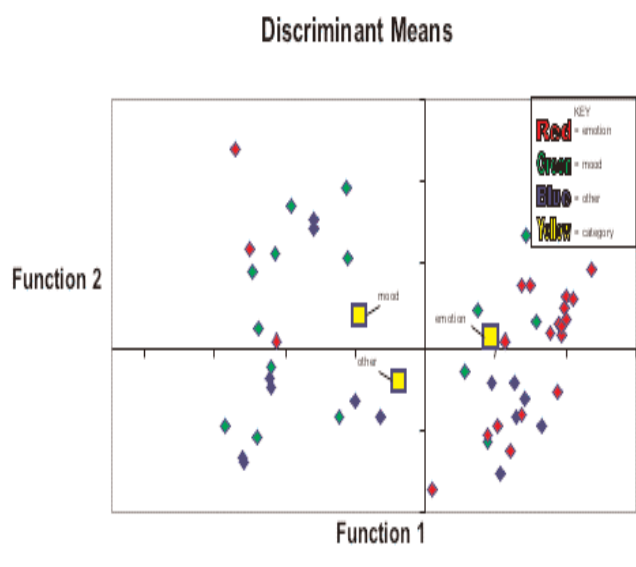
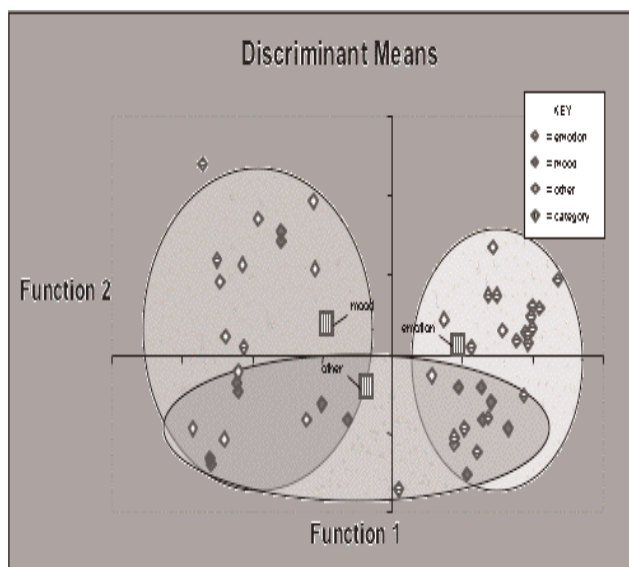


Figure 2: Scatter Diagram with Categorical Overlap Illustrated



Appendix A

Object directedness survey instructions

Instructions: On the following pages there is a list of affect terms. To determine if these terms take an object, insert them into a sentence under the format, subject-verb-object or SVO. For example, "I am ____ that ____" where the first blank is the affect term and the second blank is an object (i.e., "I am concerned that you are sick"). Another example would be "I ____" where the first blank is the term and the second blank is an object (i.e., "I eat pizza"). These are two simple examples used to illustrate object directedness of some affect terms, but are not the limit to appropriate sentences under the SVO structure. If the term fits grammatically into a sentence with the subject-verb-object format, then put an "X" in the blank next to the term. (Walk through five examples before beginning task.)

Appendix B

Sample scales/questions from survey

1. Please indicate how intense experiences of (term) typically are by recording on the answer sheet the appropriate response from the scale below.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Low intensity				High intensity		

2. Experiences of (term) typically last? (please indicate duration of experiences on the scale below)

Seconds	minutes	half hour	hour	several hours	days	weeks
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

3. Experiences of (term) may best be described with which of the following terms? (the closer the number is to the descriptive word, the greater the degree of association with the term)

a. Calm						Violent
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

b. Mild						Turbulent
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

c. Relaxed						Energized
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

d. Peace						Upset
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

e. Attraction						Aversion
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

f. Comfortable						Uncomfortable
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

g. Pleasure						Distress
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

4. How frequently are experiences of (term) associated with the following descriptions? (record the frequency from the scale below each description on the answer sheet)

Almost Never	Never	Rarely	Undecided	Occasionally	Almost Always
1	2	3	4	5	6

7

a. Increased Heart Rate:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

b. Sweaty Palms:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

c. Rapid Breathing:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

d. Flushes (face turning red):

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

e. Chills:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

f. Trembling:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
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